



Solar Power Buying Tips

Solar photovoltaic (PV) system installations are increasing in residential areas. Solar energy is an environmentally friendly way to possibly save money on your home's electric bills. While there are many reputable solar power installation firms and contractors, as solar power use increases - so do scams. Review these tips and information to learn more about solar power and how to avoid solar power scams.

If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Solar Power Options

If you install a solar PV system you will buy less electricity from your electric utility company. How much of your home's power needs is met by solar power depends on how much the PV system produces and how much electricity you use.

If you buy a solar PV system, you may be eligible for tax credits or other financial incentives that offset the initial cost.

Is Solar Power Right for You?

If you're thinking about using solar power in your home:

- Start by reviewing your utility bill to see how much electricity you used in the last year and what it cost. Even if you reduce the number of kilowatt-hours you buy from the utility, you'll still need to pay the utility's fixed charges if you remain connected to the utility's grid.
- Evaluate how you use energy, and look for ways to reduce your home's electricity use. Visit energy.gov for a tool to calculate the usage and cost savings.
- What is the age and condition of your roof? If it will need repairs or replacement in a few years, there is a cost to take down and reinstall the solar PV system.
- Figure out what size system you need to meet your average energy usage. The [customizable calculator](#) from the Department of Energy uses your address and details you provide about a system to help you estimate how much energy it will produce.



- The amount of power and value you get from a solar PV system depends on:
 - the average number of hours of direct, unshaded sunlight your roof gets annually
 - the pitch (angle) and the compass direction it faces
 - the size and efficiency of your system
 - environmental factors such as snow, dust or shade that may cover the system
- Your electric utility has rules and policies in place for homeowners who produce solar power. Most Wisconsin electric utilities offer "net metering," which pays you or gives you credit for excess power your system produces during the day and returns to the grid.
- If you have a homeowner's association, find out what steps you need to follow to install a system. Your contractor may be able to assist you on the approval process.

Tips on Interactions with Solar Providers and Contractors

Most solar PV installation companies are honest, reliable, and skilled, but some are not.

- Research the company and all contractors. Ask for the names of recent customers and call to see if they are satisfied. Did the contractor show up on time, clean up afterward, and follow through with their warranties? Would they hire the business again?

- Review resources from groups such as:

Renew Wisconsin
renewwisconsin.org

Midwest Renewable Energy Association
midwestrenew.org

North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners
nabcep.org

- Contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection, (800) 422-7128 and the Better Business Bureau (bbb.org) to find out if complaints have been filed against the business or contractor.
- Get more than one estimate. Make sure all businesses are bidding on exactly the same work. Make sure they come to the job site rather than giving a telephone estimate. Be leery of an extremely low estimate.
- Electricity savings are based in part on variable factors such as weather, electrical usage, and future electricity prices. If a salesperson provides an estimate, realize that they are only estimates. However, if your solar bids used different numbers in these areas, ask the companies why.
- Get everything in writing. Make sure you understand the terms of the contract before you sign. If you do not understand something in the contract, ask questions.
- Avoid salespeople that use high-pressure tactics. Do not feel pressured to sign a contract on the spot or sign an electronic device.
- If a solar company tells you that you'll receive a tax credit or other form of payment from the government or utility companies, have them show you documentation and independently verify it.
- Note that the federal Investment Tax Credit for homeowners, is a tax credit, not a payment. If you will not owe federal taxes or your annual tax payment is less than the tax credit than your ability to use the tax credit is affected.

- What is the total cost of the PV system to be installed? Is there a down payment?
- How much will I pay per month? Will these payments increase and if so, by how much?
- If there are any incentives from programs like Focus on Energy, who will receive the incentive?
- Does your city or local municipality require permits? If so, who will be responsible for obtaining the permits?

Right to Cancel (Wis. Adm. Code ch. ATCP 127 & Wis. Stat. s. 423.201-423.205)

If you signed a contract at your home, Wisconsin law allows you three business days to cancel. The contractor is required to provide you with two copies of the notice of your right to cancel at the time the contract is signed. You may cancel the contract by emailing, mailing, faxing, or delivering a notice to your solar provider by midnight of the third business day after you received a signed, dated copy of the contract.

Licensing and Permit Requirements

There are times the proposed solar system project may require the work of a licensed contractor such as a licensed electrician. The requirements for such licenses are overseen by the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (877) 617-1565. In addition, local municipalities may have requirements that are more restrictive than the State of Wisconsin, contacting your specific municipality to determine if additional permits or requirements exist is encouraged.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact:

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection
Bureau of Consumer Protection
2811 Agriculture Drive, PO Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708-8911

Email: DATCPHotline@wi.gov

Website: datcp.wi.gov

(800) 422-7128

TTY: (608) 224-5058

Questions to Ask

If you are considering a solar loan, lease, or power purchase agreement, also ask: